



Your Advantage

News and information to help you and your business succeed

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Employer Advantage announces

Russ Kemp, Vice President of Employer Advantage, attended the 2009 Legal and Legislative Conference of the National Association of Professional Employer Organization. (NAPEO) The conference, entitled "The New Washington: Surviving Changing Economic & Governmental Realities" was held on May 18 and 19, 2009 in Arlington, Virginia. The conference addressed the FMLA changes as well as critical legislation changes for business in 2009.

Gayle Sawyer, Accounting Manager recently represented The Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce at the US Chamber of Commerce Small Business Summit in Washington, D.C., May 11- May 13. Attendees sent letters to Congress, met with their policymakers to discuss issues, and heard from a unique line-up of speakers including Vinton G. Cerf, vice president and chief Internet evangelist for Google, and Gwendolyn Bounds, editor for The Wall Street Journal.

Steve Chaquette, Human Resources Representative, attended the 2009 Oklahoma State SHRM Conference in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma May 31 – June 2. In addition to continuing education in the Human Resources field, the conference included keynote addresses on "HR Strategies for the New Millennium" and "Delivering Red Carpet Customer Service"

What Employees Want At Work

Business owners are looking expectantly at the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) and wondering how it will impact their respective companies. At this time, many speakers, attorneys and human resource gurus are making money by scaring people about how the "big bad unions" will take over once this act is passed.

The fact is many unions gain a foothold in a company when employees feel dissatisfied. The dissatisfaction isn't only over wages and benefits, but also over promotions, image, and recognition. The bottom line is, "Are your employees happy at work?"

According to the article "Seven Things Employees Want Most to be Happy at Work" from *The Christian Science Monitor*, the "happiness factor" for many employees are often intangible items.

1. Appreciation - Praise heads the list for many workers in the search for happiness. Michal Ann Strahilevitz, a marketing professor at Golden Gate University in San Francisco, says "...there is one huge factor that does not cost an employer money: praise. So many supervisors go out of their way to let employees know what they have done wrong, but don't bother to congratulate and praise them for success. Praise does not cost anything to give, but the benefits on employee morale are priceless."

2. Respect - This attitude costs nothing and yet yields big dividends. "A sincere thank you or short note often means a great deal when it is recognizing an accomplishment or specific effort," says Lynne Sarikas, director of the MBA Career Center at Northeastern University in Boston. She finds that job dissatisfaction escalates when employees are not treated with respect or feel that their work is not appreciated.

3. Trust - Going hand in hand with respect is trust. "You have to trust the people you work for, and enjoy the people you work with," says Julie Clarkson, assistant professor of business at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. In a nationwide survey of 500 employees about what matters most in their relationship with a manager, 90 percent of workers rank honesty, fairness, and trust as their top three needs, says Terry Bacon, author of "What People Want."

continued on next page

4. **Individual growth** - What people also want is an opportunity to grow and learn on the job. "No matter how we make a living, each of us is nurtured by our own professional and personal growth," says Michael Neece, cofounder of Pongo.com, which provides résumé-writing services. "Employees want to understand how their efforts contribute to the business and want to feel that they are making a difference to their team, their department, and the company."

5. **A good boss** - Bosses also play key roles in determining a worker's happiness factor. More than half of employees responding to an annual job-satisfaction survey by Yahoo! HotJobs admit that they don't leave companies, they leave bosses. If bosses aren't honest with workers, don't listen to them, and don't care about them, employees either leave or become disengaged in their work, says Terri Levine, president of Comprehensive Coaching U in North Wales, Pa.

6. **Compatible co-workers** - Working with people they enjoy was a close second. Employees need to find an organization where the corporate culture fits their personality and work style. For some, that includes work-life balance. "People don't leave their personal lives at the door when they come to work," says Lyn Freundlich, director of human resources at Third Sector New England, a nonprofit management service in Boston. "They need as much flexibility as possible. When the connection between family and work is recognized, we get more out of employees and they're happier."

7. **A sense of purpose** - Above all, career counselors emphasize the importance of doing something you love and having a sense of purpose.

Employers can take look at culture of their organization to see if many of the "Big Seven" are available to employees. If not, it might be time for some management training and company changes to bring up the employee happiness factor. Employer Advantage offers assistance in supervisory training, forms, and policy writing to help employers make these changes.

Unemployment 101

The national unemployment rate for May 2009 was 9.4% which is up from April's rate of 8.9%. Depending upon the news source used; you can find "experts" that predict the jobless rate will hit double digits before the economic downturn is over.

No one argues that unemployment insurance is a good thing during times like these. But what do you really know about unemployment insurance?

According to the Department of Labor's website www.dol.gov, Unemployment Insurance is a federal AND state program that is jointly financed through employer payroll taxes.

FUTA (Federal Unemployment Tax Act) covers the cost of administering the unemployment insurance and job service programs in all states. In addition, during periods of high unemployment, FUTA pays for half of the cost of Extended Benefits.

States may also borrow from a specific FUTA fund to pay benefits if the state fund is depleted. States do have to pay back the funds borrowed and this cost is usually passed along to the employers in that state as an additional surcharge.

SUTA (State Unemployment Tax Act) is used for unemployment benefits of eligible workers who lose their job through no fault of their own. Under Federal law, each State administers their own unemployment insurance program and determines the eligibility, benefit amounts and length of time benefits are payable.

Employers are responsible for the benefit funding for the state programs with only three states that require small employee contributions.

Next month – **What Constitutes Unemployment Eligibility?**

Emergency Advantage

Lessons Learned in a Derecho

On May 8, 2009, the home of Employer Advantage, Joplin, Missouri was hit by a Derecho. For those of you who don't avidly follow the Weather Channel, "Derecho" is the fairly new term to describe a line of storms with destructive straight line winds. Joplin and the surrounding area received winds of over 85 mph and up to 120 mph.

Our area of town was without electricity, but the staff of Employer Advantage had an emergency plan that immediately went into effect to minimize disruption of service to our clients. Some distant clients calling in had no clue that our staff was sitting in semi-darkness working on computers with power supplied by generators.

I would like to tell you that our emergency plan went off without a hitch and that we have cornered the market on being prepared for anything. But the truth is that we had some small glitches that will be ironed out with discussion, cross training, and a few tweaks to our original plan.

Lessons Learned

- **Planning is instrumental to an emergency situation.** The generators didn't just appear; they were purchased, stored, and maintained for times like these. Also, wiring was done, extension cords purchased, and plans were made of how and whom to bring online first.
- **Everyone has a duty.** Not all of us can set up generators nor should 35 people try to at one time. People are assigned and trained to do certain tasks during emergency situations. Those people who are not assigned to specific jobs, can be directed to do tasks as needed – i.e. answer phones, carry messages (that usually can go over intercoms or computers), or be a go-getter. (a person needed to go get the tape, scissors, find a lamp, etc.)
- **Contingency Plans.** Some times, things don't go as planned. Your plan and staff must have "fall back" plans to use in case the original plan will not work. This can include temporarily changing the whole company's location, having people report to satellite locations, or regrouping and finding a new way to do things.
- **Flexibility.** Can you allow children to be at the workplace? Is there a conference room that can be converted to a day care? Schools, sitters, and day care sometimes have to close and the back up plan for child care doesn't work. If you can provide a safe place for children, you may have more employees able to come in during emergencies.
- **Employees are human too.** Sometimes it's good to have a little less work and a little more talk as your employees come in to work although they would really like to be at home picking up limbs and checking the roof for damage. By allowing a little leniency in talking and gathering, you are allowing your employees to relieve some of their own stress. We all need information, especially when things are not "normal". Let employees have access to radios, television or internet to check on school/work closings, road problems, or other announcements that affect them.
- **Humor and food.** Need I say more?

We are hoping that Southwest Missouri has had enough of weather-related emergencies, but we can't be sure of that. What we can be sure of is the need that we continue to plan emergency procedures to allow for the running of our business. If you would like more information and/or assistance in planning for emergencies, contact Employer Advantage or go to www.fema.gov or www.ready.gov for business planning.

Heat Safety

Now that Memorial Day is over, it's officially summertime and that brings cookouts, open swimming pools and hot weather.

The arrival of hot weather means outside employees need to take precautions to avoid heat related illnesses. By being prepared for the heat employees can minimize the risk of heat stress, heat exhaustion, heat stroke or even death.

Help employees beat the heat by:

- Providing plenty of water for frequent drinking
- Allowing additional rest periods while it is hot, but especially during the first few weeks of hot weather to get acclimated
- Trying to schedule more strenuous jobs during the morning hours when it is cooler
- Providing fans for enclosed areas

Encourage employees to eat light meals during the day and to avoid alcohol consumption. Many cases of heat stroke have been reported on the day after a "night on the town."

If you believe an employee is suffering from heat stress or exhaustion:

- Move the employee to a cool area
- Place the employee on his or her back with the feet raised
- Loosen clothing and apply cool moist cloths to the body and/or fan the victim
- Slowly administer sips of salt water (plain water for those with heart or blood pressure problems)
- Seek medical attention promptly if the victim faints or vomits

Heat stroke is a life-threatening, heat-related disorder associated with working under very hot and humid conditions. Heat stroke can result in coma or death. The early signs and symptoms of heat stroke include:

- A high body temperature, 104 degrees Fahrenheit or over
- Hot, dry skin that appears bluish or red
- Absence of sweat in many victims
- Rapid heart rate
- Dizziness, shivering, nausea, irritability, and severe headache progressing to mental confusion, convulsions, and unconsciousness

Early recognition of symptoms and prompt emergency treatment is important.

If you believe an employee is suffering from heat stroke:

- Call 911
- Move the victim to a cool location and remove outer clothing
- Wet the skin with water, and fan vigorously or repeatedly apply cold packs or immerse the victim in a tub of cool (not ice) water, if no water is available, fanning will help promote cooling.

The bottom line is to help your employees to be able to work in the heat and to ensure their safety. Additional information on heat safety can be found on the OSHA website at <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/guides/heat.html>, or www.redcross.org keyword "Heat Safety".